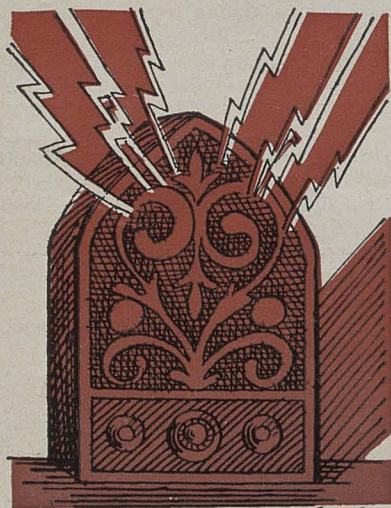
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WLRN

Communications Editor:

RICHARD L. TOBIN

The Second Half Century of Radio

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- 39 Editorial by Richard L. Tobin
- 40 Letters to the Communications Editor
- 41 Libraries in Miniature: A New Era Begins by John Tebbel
- 43 The News from Milford by M. L. Stein
- 46 It Is Your Business, Mr. Cronkite by Irving E. Fang
- 47 Agony in the Attic by Rex Lardner
- 50 Books in Communications: Forty Years on the "Times" by Stuart W. Little
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Forced by an insidious bug and the railroad strike to remain indoors for a couple of days recently, we became quickly reacquainted with the wonders and vagaries of radio broadcasting, something we hadn't encountered in quantity—except perhaps in our automobile—since the New York blackout five years ago. Fascinating as ever, far more freewheeling than television, brimming with mature news coverage, portable in the ultimate sense via the transistor, the radio world is still very much a part of the American way of life and, in many ways, the most pervasive and, therefore, the most important of all the media of communication as we approach the twenty-first century.

Commercial radio enters its second half century this month, though technically KDKA broadcast the first radio program on election night in November 1920 to announce the Presidential landslide of Warren G. Harding. This broadcast caused a national sensation and was given enormous publicity in the American press, which must have known in its heart of hearts that its most persistent competitor had just been born. From that hour on, the journalistic word "extra!" began to disappear from the American language, and, step by step, radio gradually took over the function of bulletin news, long the province of the local newspaper. To say that KDKA changed journalism forever is to belabor the obvious.

Actually, it was not until the early fall of 1921 that any radio station in this country received a regular radio license. WBZ in Springfield, Massachusetts, was the first to be formally licensed, followed by WJZ, then in Newark, New Jersey, and next WWJ in Detroit and KDKA. Moreover, KDKA, WBZ, and WJZ became broadcasting's first network of stations under the single ownership of Westinghouse. On March 4, 1921, KDKA broadcast the Inaugural Address of President Harding,

not directly from Washington but through an announcer reading the text over the air from Pittsburgh. In July 1921, Jack Dempsey defeated Georges Carpentier at Boyle's Thirty Acres in Jersey City, and once again KDKA became the first to broadcast a heavy-weight championship fight. Come October half a century ago, KDKA broadcast the first World Series, and commercial radio was out of the starting gate.

As a teen-ager in the 1920s, one who wound yards of copper wire around many a Quaker Oats box in crystal-set days, and who later made more than 2,000 broadcasts for the New York *Herald Tribune* over WOR, we have always been fascinated by the liaison instantaneous radio communication makes possible. Not even the automobile took hold of the American public as rapidly as did radio. In 1922 and 1923, the U.S. government issued 1,140 transmitter construction permits. Radios of whatever kind—crystal sets, the first vacuum tubes, superheterodynes, clumsy apparatus with A and B batteries—were sold to half a million Americans in 1923; a million-and-a-half in 1924; two million in 1925. Add to these figures the countless number of home-built sets so simple of construction at first and so thrilling to their creators when the faint fantastic voice came in over the headphones from Davenport, Cincinnati, Atlanta, Denver, and, of course, always Pittsburgh. Today, believe it or not, radio sets sell at the rate of more than fifty million a year, counting auto radios and portable transistors.

Experimental network operation over telephone lines began as early as 1922, and the National Broadcasting Company went on the air as a network in 1926, with WEAJ in New York City as its flagship. The Radio Act of 1927 created a five-member Federal Radio Commission because broadcasters were jumping allocated frequencies

and increasing their power at will, causing chaotic interference. These early pioneers were a far cry from the 4,316 AM stations and the 2,175 FM stations now licensed by the federal government. Including car radios, there are now more than 320 million radio sets in use in this country; radio advertising volume alone last year was well over a billion dollars. During news emergency periods, such as blackouts, assassinations, wars, political conventions, elections, ice storms, and labor tie-ups, local and national, radio is beyond argument the fundamental communicating medium. It is said that every other person in the United States listens to radio at least once a day.

Where is radio going in its second half century? Well, it's a long time from the days of Joe Penner, Fred Allen, H. V. Kaltenborn, Amos 'n' Andy, Paul Whiteman, Fibber McGee's closet, the Quiz Kids, and Orson Welles's Martian invasion. Television has largely superseded radio in the prime evening hours as the great American escape mechanism, just as post-dinner TV has also largely stripped the printed word of



its rights in the field of escape fiction. Yet, the printed word and radio, now both largely non-fiction, live and flower for an ever better-informed public. Radio in particular seems to have grown up since TV took over its hackneyed situation comedy routines, its stand-up comics, its weekly musicals. What was worst in radio has deserted for the glamour of the picture tube. What is left is often the very best in music at many levels, news coverage unparalleled in any other medium including TV and print, some of the most rewarding talk, sober or gay, available anywhere, and a format so simple and comparatively inexpensive as to be indestructible. Where is radio going in its second half century? It is going to stay right here, that's where, quite possibly continuing to increase in stature and wisdom with the years and at the expense of its wealthier but deteriorating relative, network TV. —R. L. T.

THE FIRST KNOWN radio commercial was broadcast August 28, 1922, over WEA. The rate was \$100 for ten minutes. H. M. Blackwell spoke for the full ten minutes about the wonders of Hawthorne Court, a real estate development in Jackson Heights, Queens. It was probably also the longest commercial in the first half century of radio.

Letters to the Communications Editor

When a Society Is Not a Fraternity

RE: Richard L. Tobin's editorial "When Officials Shackle the News" [SR, Dec. 12]. Happy to see reports on the Sigma Delta Chi convention speakers, plus references to the Freedom of Information Committee report. It's a small point, but we seem to be only holding our own in a ten-year battle to have Sigma Delta Chi properly identified in print. We haven't been a "fraternity" since 1960, when SDX was reincorporated as a professional journalist society. Since we still have the Greek letters, we may never win—but we'll keep trying.

RUSSELL E. HURST,
Executive Officer,
Sigma Delta Chi,
Chicago, Ill.

Candid, Courageous Cronkite

WITH REFERENCE to "What It's Like to Broadcast News" [SR, Dec. 12], an award for candor was clearly earned by Walter Cronkite when he had the courage to utter the words: "We in radio and television with our greater impact and our numerous outlets have forced many of our print competitors out of business." That may not be news, but what does impress me is the willingness to state a fact so frankly.

As a boy, I was thrilled on more than one occasion by the sound of "Extra!" being proclaimed in the street below. Often what was being peddled so loudly proved less than earth-shaking. Even so, the purchaser wasn't entirely disappointed; elsewhere in the paper he'd bought were items that added measurably to his store of knowledge.

Today, as we patronize our local newsdealer, we rarely are motivated by a sense of anticipation matching that long-ago response to the urgent cry of "Extra!" In the final analysis, though, we get at least as much ultimate satisfaction from a well-edited daily now as we did then. Moreover, we can peruse the happenings of the day at our own pace rather than at the arbitrary one the tyranny of video makes mandatory.

Still, there's no denying that the public is the loser when, as in Manhattan of an evening, there's a single newspaper on the stands rather than the four that were available up to 1950. Most depressing of all is that this situation gives every evidence of being permanent.

THOMAS G. MORGANSEN,
Jackson Heights, N.Y.

Single-Sense and Two-Sense Media

THE ARTICLE by John Tebbel "Network Television's Uncertain Future" [SR, Dec. 12] is superficially quite good. True, radio is in large part a disaster area. But what about NBC's "Monitor" and the CBS affiliates that carry fifteen- to thirty-minute special interest talk shows daily and weekly? Another significant problem in the article is the all too common generality

regarding cable television. The promise of CATV is certainly great in the realm of sociological change or stasis, depending on viewpoint. However, from a technological point of view, all CATV really offers is a better technique for connecting points for communications purposes.

The question of the demise of network radio, even allowing for the faulty assumption that it has already passed on, does not hinge on abandonment so much as on supersession. The single-sense medium simply gave over to the two-sense medium. Such is not the situation with network TV's predicted decline. An uneconomical and excessively ecologically exploitative electronic technique called broadcast is passing from the scene.

Currently, the FCC is deciding among the established wired (telephone) and wireless (broadcast) groups and a relative newcomer who attempts to combine the two techniques: CATV. The winner will probably be a coalition of existing vested interests, and the results are almost too fearful to contemplate. Perhaps the U. S. military-industrial complex will give up trying to control economies of other nations with goods and money as quickly as it is attempting to give up control of their politics with war. Instead, perhaps a military-industrial-communications complex will begin the attempt to control men's minds.

HUGH KASBAUM,
Director of Training,
National Cable Television Institute,
Oklahoma City, Okla.

From TV's Image to Verse

In reference to "Television: The Splitting Image" by Marya Mannes [SR, Nov. 14]:

In history we hear how man was prone
To rise from simple ways in slow
ascent.

We read that once there was an Age of
Stone,

And then an Age of Iron, provident.

Oh, when some future excavator
scrapes

Across our strata and proceeds to ope
The vaults that hold our television
tapes,

He'll name our bubbling age the Age of
Soap.

He'll find (along with cigarettes and
beer)

The fetish of a soiled society
That overcompensates its guilty fear
With all dependence on detergency.
Whatever else we may defile, bemean,
We keep, foremost, our pores and
raiment clean.

WILBUR DORSETT,
Rollins College,
Winter Park, Fla.

